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Paradoxes in the U. S. S. R.

It is a curious fact that just at a time when the Soviet leaders are showing the greatest concern over the flaws in their industrial and agricultural system, the United States has awakened to a fuller realization of Russian advances in military technology. While Nikita Khrushchev was speaking, in Zagreb, of Russia's willingness to borrow ideas from Yugoslavia and the United States, Allen Dulles, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, was warning a New York audience not to underrate the scientific and technical achievements of Russia.

These phenomena are not necessarily contradictory. It has been one of the great fallacies of our times to oversimplify the results of the Communist dictatorship in Russia; to assume that because of glaring failures in some respects it must necessarily be weak in all, or conversely to take some strong points as typical of the whole. This has often led military intelligence astray.

When the Red Army made its poor initial showing against Finland in the Winter War, it was downgraded by nearly all Western observers. Their judgment seemed confirmed by the catastrophic losses which the Wehrmacht inflicted on the Red Army in the early stages of Hitler's invasion. The Russian comeback led to a drastic revision of Soviet capabilities in ground warfare, but the popular belief was still strong that the Russian methods were based largely on the simpler forms of modern weapons—especially tactical air and conventional artillery—and on large masses of men, employed wastefully by Western standards.

Defects in Russian mass production were known and led to faulty presumptions that atomic weapons and electronic devices—depending as they did on both high laboratory standards and a broad, efficient industrial base—would lag in the U. S. S. R. The swift Russian production of atomic and hydrogen bombs, with long-range planes to deliver them, startled American intelligence.

It is obvious that the Russians can make a concentrated and effective industrial effort in a fairly large segment of their economy for specific purposes. That this is done at the expense of other segments, and of the welfare of the peoples of the Soviet Union, is almost equally obvious. The faults which Khrushchev has charged against Soviet agriculture, for example, such as overcentralized control, failure to adapt to different regions and climates and lack of incentives to labor, would not necessarily impede a crash scientific-industrial program for limited objectives.

This would explain why Russia can detonate nuclear weapons and fly new heavy bombers in unexpected numbers at the same time that the Soviet Union is sending farmers to study American methods and the Russian press is complaining about production problems in much of its industry. It shows that the U. S. S. R. derives industrial strength as well as weaknesses from its authoritarian rule—and neither should be underestimated.